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SUBJECT: BILATERAL CONSULAR WORKING GROUP DISCUSSES VISA
WAIVER PROGRAM ROADMAP

REF: A. A. 05 BRATISLAVA 960

[B. B. 05 BRATISLAVA 490](#)

[C. C. 05 BRATISLAVA 130](#)

[1](#). Bratislava's Bilateral Consular Working Group (BCWG) met for the fifth time on September 26, 2006, at the Embassy. The meeting was chaired by Ambassador Vallee. MFA Political Director Miroslav Lajcak headed the Slovak delegation. The most significant positive wads the GOS commitment to notify the USG (as well as Interpol, as was already being done) promptly of any lost or stolen passports.

[2](#). Ambassador Vallee discussed the political climate in the United States, and in reference to the "Santorum Amendment" proposing visa waiver status in exchange for Certain levels of contributions to the coalition in Iraq, explained how Congress passes legislation and the roles of committees. Ambassador Lajcak discussed a recent meeting in New York of representatives of the Visegrad Four (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary) in addition to the "Baltic Three" to form a "Coalition for Visa Equality." Lajcak assured Ambassador that the intent was to provide a unified approach to visa waiver program (VWP) accession while avoiding any anti-U.S. sentiment. Lajcak also said that Foreign Minister Kubis was pleased by his frank discussion of the topic with Secretary Rice during their meeting on the margins of UNGA. Lajcak said it is important that the U.S. realized the "urgency of the situation" and recognize that Slovakia is doing everything in its power to meet VWP requirements.

[3](#). Post shared, in confidence, visa statistics with our interlocutors to help illustrate both the reality of the situation, as well as the excellent progress that has been made in recent years (Slovakia's refusal rate for B1/B2 applicants has dropped from 44 percent to slightly over 16 percent since FY 2003). Post reiterated that as the Slovak economy continues to flourish and unemployment decreases, the pressure for economic migration will decrease and, as a result, the refusal rate should decrease.

[4](#). Slovak passport officials shared progress on Slovakia's implementation of biometric passport data. While Slovakia had originally sought to phase in biometrics, beginning with facial recognition in September 2006 and later adding fingerprint data, the country has since decided to hold off until passports with both biometric features can be issued. The GOS anticipates that by June 28, 2008, all Slovak passports being issued will include both features. The Slovak interlocutors also briefed us on the new central storage, processing, and controlled access to blank Slovak passport books, and notification procedures. They stated their willingness

to provide prompt notification to InterPol and the USG in the event of theft or loss of blank passports, while stressing that no such loss has occurred in over a decade. They agreed to respond to U.S. requests for information on passport controls and certifications of passport issuance procedures. Post also shared information regarding new U.S. E-Passports and emergency passport documents.

15. The BCWG discussed problems encountered by U.S. citizens applying for residency in Slovakia; specifically, that local police are not consistent in acceptance or denial of FBI fingerprint results without an apostille (which is not available for the documents). Some Americans have gotten around the problem by having a certified true copy of the report made, and then having the notary's signature authenticated and apostilled. Post requested the GOS consider uniform acceptance of the unauthenticated document together with the FBI's cover letter stating authentication is not available or, barring that, that post and the GOS explore acceptable alternatives.

16. Finally, the Slovak delegation raised concerns and difficulties encountered by their posts in the U.S., such as consular notification failures or lack of response to requests for judicial assistance. Post passed along contact information for the appropriate offices at the Department and encouraged the Slovak government to contact the Department (and post) in the event of future incidents.

VALLEE